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WASHINGTON -- Two Pennsylvania congressmen plan to introduce a bill Tuesday to block a controversial Medicare competitive bidding program for medical device makers.

Reps. Jason Altmire, D-McCandless, and Glenn Thompson, R-Centre, have long tried to slow or halt the new Medicare program, which began in January in nine metropolitan areas, including Pittsburgh.

The program, in an effort to cut Medicare Part D costs, has companies offer bids to sell devices like oxygen tanks and power wheelchairs. Medicare selects a group of suppliers for eight categories of devices in each market based on which ones submit the lowest bids.

The device industry is fighting the new program, saying the severe price cuts --- in Pittsburgh, prices have dropped by more than a third --- will force small providers out of business and cause cutbacks in all-important customer service. They say the industry is facing an unfair squeeze when, by keeping patients in their homes rather than hospitals, they are an overall money saver for the health care sector.

The Fairness in Medicare Bidding Act would immediately repeal the program and offset the expected taxpayer savings it provides by taking away \$20 billion in unobligated funds from agencies --- giving the Office of Management and Budget the task of deciding where to cut, while exempting the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Altmire and Mr. Thompson are holding a news conference Tuesday to announce the bill featuring Georgie Blackburn, of Tarentum-based medical supplier Blackburn's, and Stan Holbrook, of the Three Rivers Center for Independent Living in Wilkinsburg, among other foes of the program.